

Job Aid

Alternative Word Lists

This job aid contains three word lists; medical terms, familiar words that may not be understood in a health care context; and value judgment words that may need an example to help patients better understand the concept. Each word list provides a plain language alternative that can be used with patients to help them better understand.

Medical terms that patients may not understand

Medical Term	Plain Language Alternative
Ailment	Sickness, illness, problem with your health
Analgesic	Pain killer
Anti-inflammatory	Lessens swelling and irritation
Benign	Will not cause harm, is not cancer
Carcinoma	Cancer
Contraception	Birth control
Dysfunction	Problem
Hypertension	High blood pressure
Inhibitor	Drug that stops something that is bad for you
Infertility	Can't get pregnant
Intermittent	Off and on
Lesion	Wound, sore, infected patch of skin
Lipids	Fats in the blood
Menopause	Stopping periods, change of life
Menses	Period
Oral	By mouth
Osteoporosis	Soft, brittle bones
Toxic	Poisonous
Vertigo	Dizziness

The content for this material was excerpted from the Healthcare Communities website and is available at: <http://www.healthcarecommunities.org/>.

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Familiar words that may not be understood in a health care context

Familiar Word	Plain Language Alternative
Active role	Taking part in
Activity	Something you do, something you do often, like driving a car
Adverse (reaction)	Bad
Avoid	Stay away from, do not use (or eat)
Cognitive	Learning, thinking
Collaborate	Work together
Factor	Other things
Gauge	Measure, get a better idea of, test (dependent on context)
Generic	Product sold without a brand name, like ibuprofen (Advil is a brand name)
Hazardous	Not safe, dangerous
High-intensity exercise	Use an example, such as running
Intake	What you eat or drink, what goes into your body
Landmark	Very important (adjective) Important event, turning point (noun)
Noncancerous	Not cancer
Option	Choice
Poultry	Chicken, turkey, etc.
Prosthesis	Replacement for a body part, such as a man-made arm
Referral	Ask you to see another doctor, get a second opinion
Support	Help with your needs—for money, friendship, or care
Wellness	Good health, feeling good

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Value judgment words that may need an example

Familiar Word	Plain Language Alternative
Adequate	Enough Example (adequate water): 6 to 8 glasses a day
Adjust	Fine-tune, change
Cautiously	With care, slowly Example: making sure to hold onto handrails
Excessive	Too much Example (bleeding): if blood soaks through the bandage
Increase gradually	Add to Example (exercise): add 5 minutes a week
Moderately	Not too much Example (exercise): so you don't get out of breath
Progressive	Gets worse (or better)
Routinely	Often Example: every week, every other day
Significantly	Enough to make a difference Example (smoking/heart disease): 2 times the chance of having heart disease
Temporary	For a limited time, for about (an hour, day...) Example: for less than a week